



Sherry Flyr (back row, yellow shirt) with Vida Dzobo (seated) and her hosts in Ghana, Africa

Mary Elva Smith

The Experience of a Lifetime

BY SHERRY FLYR

Every three years a group of Presbyterian Women travels to another part of the world to listen to the pain and the joy that their sisters experience and to share faith stories and ministries with each other. It's called an exchange because, the following year, a group of women from the same part of the world are invited to attend the Churchwide Gathering of Presbyterian Women to tell their stories to their North American sisters.

The participants—at least one from each of the 16 synods—make a commitment to share their experiences within their synods for two years following the exchange. Other group members include intentionally selected racial ethnic participants and staff.

Presbyterian Women in the synods endorse the participants and have these responsibilities:

- Assisting the participants in raising funds for the cost of the exchange

- Extending hospitality to a guest from one of the visited countries and providing opportunities to learn from this guest within the synod during the two weeks prior to the Churchwide Gathering of Presbyterian Women that follows the exchange
- Providing opportunities for participants to share experiences throughout the synod for two years following the exchange

One of the blessings of a Global Exchange is the opportunity for enduring friendships—between North American participants in the experience and with the people met during the Global Exchange. In my case, I met Mrs. Vida Dzobo when our group toured schools in Ho, Ghana, during the 2002 Global Exchange to Africa. I also had the privilege of spending time in her home for a “home stay” experience.


Vida founded the Dora Memorial School Complex in 1987, after she retired from teaching (preschool through 9th grade). At the time of our visit she was starting a senior secondary school (10th, 11th and 12th grades). Sadly, only 60 percent of children ever go to school in Ghana and after 6th grade many drop out of school because of a shortage of schools or finances. Only a good education will qualify a young person, especially a girl, for one of the few quality jobs that exist in Ghana.

The senior secondary school was started on faith and with very little money. In the beginning, senior students attended classes from 3:00 P.M. to 8:00 P.M., after the younger students went home or back to the dormitory. Later, Vida converted an old chicken coop into a classroom so the students could attend classes during regular school hours.

I include Vida's story whenever I share stories about my experiences in Africa. PW groups and churches in the Synod of the Rocky Mountains have generously contributed funds toward building permanent structures for the senior secondary school in Ghana. The first building, containing four classrooms for the growing number of students, has already been completed. Construction is underway on a three-story building that will replace the first building and allow it to be used for a variety of other purposes.

As the senior secondary school grows, so does my friendship with Vida. She and I keep in touch by letters and email. We had a wonderful visit when she stayed with us before the 2003 Churchwide Gathering of Presbyterian Women, and my husband and I were thrilled to attend the inauguration of the senior secondary school in February 2004.

The opportunity for more friendships is just around the corner. The destinations for the 2005 Global Exchange are Brazil and Washington, D.C. and Presbyterian



Brazil

Capital: Brasilia
Area: 8,511,965 square km
Life Expectancy: men 67.16, women 75.3
Adults living with HIV/AIDS: 0.7%
Literacy: 86.4% (men 86.1%, women 86.6%)
Economy: Coffee, refined metal ore, chemicals, cocoa, soybeans, sugar, cotton, wood, automobiles and parts, shoes; world's largest producer and exporter of coffee and orange juice, second in soy beans

Per capita GDP: \$7,600 (22% living below poverty line)
Religion: Roman Catholic 80%
Language: Portuguese (official), Spanish, English, French

Source: www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook

Women will focus on how United States social, economic, political and educational policies impact people by:

- Hearing the cries of our sisters and responding with compassion
- Working for the end of all forms of violence
- Advocating for the rights of women and children
- Supporting our global partners
- Allowing ourselves to be transformed by partnership experiences

Going on a Global Exchange is an experience of a lifetime. If you are interested, contact your synod moderator as soon as possible for an application and more information. Completed applications are due to the Synod Moderator by June 1, 2004. 🍷

Sherry Flyn is a synod representative to the Churchwide Coordinating Team of Presbyterian Women, representing the Synod of the Rocky Mountains, and chair of the PW Global Exchange Committee.



History of PW Global Exchanges

Originally called Global Experiences, the current Global Exchange program of Presbyterian Women began as a program of United Presbyterian Women in the early 1970s.

Year	Destination (Emphasis)
1973	Central Europe
1974	India and Nepal (Hunger)
1977	Asian Encounter—Japan, Taiwan, Korea, Philippines
1980	Asian Rim
1981	Central America
1984	South Africa (Apartheid)
1987	China
1988	Presbyterian Women is formed—Global Experiences become Global Exchanges
1990	Australia (Indigenous people)
1993	Eastern Europe
1996	Southeast Asia (Tourism and child prostitution)
1999	Middle East and Detroit, Michigan (Welfare of women and Islam, Judaism and Christianity in the Middle Eastern world)
2002	Africa
2005	Brazil and Washington, D.C. (Impact of U.S. social, economic, political and educational policies)